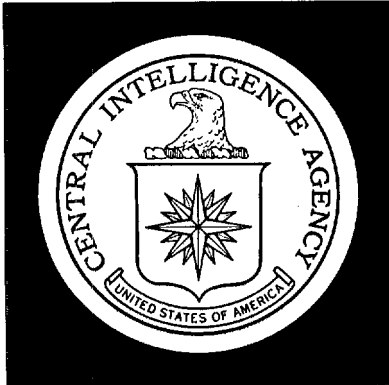


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WESTERN EUROPE/COMMUNISM: The French and Italian Communist parties are concerned over the possible rehabilitation of Stalin at the 24th Soviet Communist party congress next month.

[redacted] if Stalin is rehabilitated the PCF will publicly express disapproval. [redacted]

[redacted] the Italian party (PCI) agrees with the French [redacted]

[redacted] that annulment of the decisions of the 20th congress would force PCI disapproval of this "backward step."

The PCF remains under pro-Soviet leadership but has been renewing its efforts to show independence from Moscow to better its chances of forming alliances with the non-Communist left. In preparation for municipal elections in mid-March, the PCF has been opening cell meetings to public view and holding public discussions at which party leaders answer questions with relative candor.

At an unprecedented luncheon for non-Communist journalists at the beginning of February, the acting party leader said he definitely does not believe things are moving toward restoration of the Stalin cult, but if this were the case, the French Communists would be completely in dissent. In Italy, a recently published book by a PCI member includes previously unpublished material on Italian Communists who died in the USSR under Stalinist repression.

Italian - French Communist cooperation, close in connection with the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968, fell off during the past two years but now appears to be reviving. Both parties in recent months criticized past party management in Poland, punitive sentences in Leningrad, and recent Czechoslovak justification of the August 1968 events in Prague [redacted]

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Stalin as the symbol of the old ways of doing things remains a key issue for the Soviet Communist Party as for Communist parties abroad. On this as on other issues there appear to be conflicting impulses at work in the Soviet party leadership as various groups attempt to influence the decisions of the 24th party congress now only five weeks away. There is no evidence, however, that any decisive shifts have yet taken place that might result in a change from the present policy of gradually restoring Stalin's image.

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